





MERMAIDS

DAVID QUINLAN reviews the movie which teams CHER and WINONA RYDER as mother and daughter

● IN her new film, *Mermaids*, Cher is back doing all the things she does best: look about 10 years younger than she is, wear outrageous clothes and live a lifestyle that's the talk of the town. The town being small and American, Cher's Rachel Flax soon becomes its most outrageous character. "She's a kick," says Cher of her latest role, first since *Moonstruck*. "Quite strong, very funny and *never* dull! She was much more modern than most people in the film's period (the early Sixties), so she just makes up her own rules.

"And she's definitely her own woman in a time when that wasn't so easy. She goes her own way while everyone else is trying to look like Doris Day. And I think she figures that if she can control a situation, then she won't get hurt or feel a terrible amount of pain.

"That's why she never stays in one place for long."

What Cher doesn't say is that when life and realities catch up on Mrs Flax, she's also equal to the challenge.

Britain's Bob Hoskins turns on his American accent again to play the honest Joe who woos, and – maybe – wins the elusive Mrs Flax, who indeed proves as slippery as a mermaid when it comes to settling down.

"I like this character I play," Hoskins says. "He's like a comfortable pair of slippers waiting in the loft. At the same time, he's a simple man, sensual and easy-going. He's also firm, but without malice or spite. And he's honest – just like Mrs Flax.

"It must be a first – I get to play a nice guy, and I get the girl – I hope. What a pleasure!"

VERDICT

● A mother and daughter fable. And, this

being the movies, these are no ordinary mother and daughter. Rachel Flax (Cher) is sexy, sassy, brassy and on the move from town to town, man to man, in the America of the early Sixties.

Mrs Flax's idea of a solid meal is a marshmallow kebab, and her motto is "Life is change, and death is dwelling in the past or staying in one place too long."

Daughter Caroline (Winona Ryder) thinks she wants to be a nun (no mean feat as the Flaxes are Jewish), but finds she has too many of mother's hormones floating around and falls heavily for a hunky caretaker at the nursery instead.

There's also a younger daughter, who wants to be a swimming champ, but the film really revolves around Cher and Ryder and they keep it flowing warmly along in spite of the fact that deceptively little actually happens. Bob Hoskins is sweetly blue-collar as the man who may make momma settle down, but he's kept pretty much to the sidelines, as the 'mermaids' try to sort out a life together via a rather contrived emotional climax. ●

Producers
LAUREN LLOYD/WALLIS NICITA/
PATRICK PALMER

Director
RICHARD BENJAMIN

Screenplay
JUNE ROBERTS

Photography
HOWARD ATHERTON

Music
JACK NITZSCHE

110 Minutes – Certificate 12
(RANK FILM DISTRIBUTORS)

Rachel Flax	....	CHER
Lou Landsky	....	BOB HOSKINS
Charlotte Flax	....	WINONA RYDER
Joe	....	MICHAEL SCHOEFFLING
Kate Flax	....	CHRISTINA RICCI
Carrie	....	CAROLINE McWILLIAMS
Mother Superior	....	JAN MINER
Mary O'Brien	....	BETSEY TOWNSEND
Mr Crain	....	RICHARD McELVAIN
Mrs Crain	....	PAULA PLUM

RATINGS

SCRIPT 7

PERFORMANCES 8

PRODUCTION 7

DIRECTION 7

ENTERTAINMENT VALUE 7



FILM
14



**CHER
BOB HOSKINS
WINONA RYDER
MICHAEL
SCHOEFFLING**

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PLOT

“**M**ermaids” is an insightful and highly comic look at a teenage girl’s coming of age in 1963 smalltown America, which only falls down during a rather sentimental last half an hour.

Eccentric single parent Mrs Flax (Cher) moves her daughters, ‘difficult’ teen Charlotte (Ryder) and adorable little swimming buff Kate (Christina Ricci) from town to town, unable to take root in any one place for long.

When the Flaxs move yet again to the attractive town of Eastport, Massachussetts, trouble occurs when prim, naive Catholicism convert, Charlotte convinces herself she is pregnant when she and Joe Schoeffling, share an innocent first kiss. Copying mom’s flighty behaviour, she runs away, unable to face up to the possibility that she is carrying a Joey Junior!

Meanwhile, Mrs F is becoming alarmed at just how close Kate is becoming to mom’s shoe salesman boyfriend Lou (Hoskins).

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Above: Charlotte thinks she’s pregnant and visits the baby clinic to find out the truth. Below left: Mrs Flax (Cher) poses for the camera.

OPINION

“**M**ermaids” is a funny, convincing “rites of passage” drama in which both a teenager and her mother do some badly needed growing up.

Both Cher and the much-touted Winona Ryder convince in their roles, young Ms Ryder showing a decided flair for blackly comic humour in both her acting performance and wry narration. Bob Hoskins provides useful supporting work as the kindly salesman who is only too willing to make a commitment to the recalcitrant Mrs Flax.

The film only goes slightly haywire during the last half an hour which covers Charlotte’s running away episode and includes a rather obvious tragic incident which helps the family get back together again. The cramming in of these two events is to a relatively short space of time spoils the nice laconic pace.

That aside, “Mermaids” is a well-acted, tautly directed comedy/drama for the more discerning film goer, but some will be put off going thanks to the movie’s somewhat meaningless title. **CK**

★★★★½